



Urban Forest Defense Zone Fuels Reduction

Proposed Action

BACKGROUND AND LOCATION

Since the early 1980s, the USDA Forest Service has acquired environmentally sensitive lands within the Lake Tahoe Basin to protect them from development and protect water quality and clarity of Lake Tahoe. Many of these acquired lands are located within or adjacent to developed sub-divisions and communities surrounding Lake Tahoe. The Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU) has been implementing restoration treatments on these urban forest parcels and in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) since the mid-1990s. Restoration actions included thinning vegetation, reducing hazardous fuels, removing hazard (dead and dying) trees, conducting revegetation, and implementing erosion control in disturbed areas.

In 2007, the Angora Fire in Eldorado County and the Washoe Fire in Placer County burned over 3,100 acres and destroyed over 250 homes. Fuel reduction treatments completed on urban forest parcels and in WUI areas prior to these fires modified fire behavior, reducing tree death and allowing fire crews to establish control lines and protect structures. Recent destructive fires in California and Nevada have demonstrated the need for healthy forests that are resilient to disturbances such as drought, insect infestation, and wildfire. This project would conduct periodic fuel reduction treatments to manage tree age, tree density, and species diversity and would remove hazard trees, reduce wildfire risk, and complement defensible space actions on adjoining non-federal lands.

The proposed project is located in El Dorado and Placer counties in California, and in Douglas and Washoe counties and Carson City rural area in Nevada (see separate map). The project area includes treatments on approximately 1,800 acres of undeveloped LTBMU managed lands intermixed with developed neighborhoods, plus approximately 2,300 acres within the WUI Defense Zone (buffer approximately 200 feet from private property). The project includes approximately 90 acres in Inventoried Roadless Areas or IRAs (Lincoln, Dardanelles, and Pyramid). No new or temp roads will be constructed in IRAs.

PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action would include the following vegetation and soil treatments to reduce fuel loads and improve forest health within the project area:

- Vegetation Management
 - Thinning to create and maintain healthy forests that increase the resilience to insect, disease, climate change, and drought
 - Hazardous fuel management
 - Removal of forest products generated from thinning operations
 - Conifer removal to promote aspen forests, meadows, and riparian habitats
 - Hazard tree removal
- Reforestation may be used to increase the diversity of tree species, age, and size.
- Restoration of compacted and disturbed soils to reduce erosion risk and discourage unauthorized vehicle use and land encroachments.
- Prescribed burning to remove slash piles created from thinning treatments and reduce fuels.

Thinning treatments would include use of mechanical ground-based harvesting equipment and use of hand crews. Residual post-thinning conditions would generally range between 80-120 Basal Area. Use of ground-

based harvesting equipment would be limited to slopes less than 30 percent. Treatments in stream environment zones may be implemented with ground-based equipment when soil conditions are operable. Cut material may be removed offsite for utilization of forest biomass (such as saw timber, fuelwood, woodchip, or other products), chipped or masticated on site, and/or piled and later burned. Winching and/or cable yarding with partial or full suspension may be utilized to remove forest biomass. Ground-based mechanical treatments would generally be limited to the dry season (May 1st – October 15th) in the Lake Tahoe Basin; however, exceptions may be granted, and winter operations may occur based on operable conditions.

In portions of the project area that are within 100 feet of a structure on private property, the project would allow for homeowners to perform defensible space treatments under the Forest Service's Homeowner Agreement and Guidelines for Defensible Space/Fuels Reduction for annual management of defensible space.

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

PUBLIC LAW 114–322: Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act, Section 3603: A forest management activity conducted in the LTBMU for the purpose of reducing forest fuels is categorically excluded from the requirements of NEPA, if the forest management activity: notwithstanding section 423 of the Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2009, does not exceed 10,000 acres, including not more than 3,000 acres of mechanical thinning; is developed in coordination with impacted parties, specifically including representatives of local governments, such as county supervisors or county commissioners, and in consultation with other interested parties; and, is consistent with the LTBMU land and resource management plan.